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New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 18

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/62/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/344)

Draft resolutions (A/62/L.18, A/62/L.19, A/62/L.20 and A/62/L.21)

Statement by the President

The President: On Monday, during our debate on revitalization at the 56th meeting, I stressed that it was first and foremost by squarely tackling the priority issues of the day that the General Assembly makes itself stronger, more effective and more relevant to the lives of the global public. We have the opportunity today to bolster the authority and international standing of the Assembly by addressing the question of Palestine in the light of recent developments.

Over the years, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has produced great losses and immense human suffering on both sides. It has had wider security implications for the region and peaceful relations between nations around the world. In his message on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, President Mahmoud Abbas made a solemn plea for the right of his people to enjoy the same sense of freedom and security that we all take for granted. He also reiterated that security and a just peace can only be achieved through mutual respect based and equality between both peoples. To achieve that goal, as noted by His Excellency Ambassador Natalegawa, President of the Security Council, the importance of restoring inter-Palestinian dialogue to rebuild national unity must be recognized.

I would like to praise Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas for their courage and willingness to engage in substantive results-orientated discussions at Annapolis, which have led to the Joint Understanding of the way forward. They both spoke in unison when they stated that the time has come for both peoples to put the past behind them. Both sides want peace and an end to terror.

I would like to commend President George Bush of the United States for bringing the parties together to launch a serious process of final status negotiations and for his personal commitment to support the conclusion of a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine before the end of 2008. The outcome of the Annapolis Conference offers a great opportunity for a permanent two-State solution. However, as the Secretary-General emphasized during his speech at Annapolis, the prerequisite for success requires a resolute commitment to boldly follow words with deeds.

The General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to support a two-State solution — Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders — as the most viable solution. The most encouraging aspect of the Annapolis meeting is that both sides have agreed to

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this approach and expressed their determination to end violence and usher in a new era of peace based on freedom, security, justice, dignity and mutual respect, principles that are the core purpose of the United Nations.

I would like to call on all Member States to make every effort to support this process. We must seize every opportunity for progress to fulfil the decades-long aspiration of the Palestinian people to live in freedom with dignity and for the right of the Israeli people to live in peace and security with their neighbours. The only way to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is through continuous dialogue, compromise and the resolute commitment to achieve a permanent solution. Both Israelis and Palestinians are going to have to be honest with their own people about the price of peace. This will require difficult choices and sacrifice on both sides, as part of a shared vision for a better future.

The stakes are high, but the alternatives are worse. The General Assembly has repeatedly expressed its concern over the continued deterioration of humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank. Without immediate progress, the ongoing situation will exacerbate the humanitarian, economic and security situation of the Palestinian people. This worsening security and economic situation is increasing the suffering endured by women and is hampering the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The General Assembly is committed to ensuring that the peaceful resolution of the conflict continues to be at the forefront of the international community's agenda. The Quartet has welcomed the commitment to launch peace negotiations leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State. The Quartet's representative, Tony Blair, has proposed concrete measures to strengthen Palestinian institutions and rehabilitate the economy. The Paris conference in December offers an important opportunity to fund these proposals and lay the foundation for a viable Palestinian State.

I urge the international community, therefore, to offer its full financial, technical and political support to make these reforms a reality and to help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

I also appeal to both Israeli and Palestinian officials to redouble their efforts to immediately implement their respective obligations under the Road Map and create the necessary conditions for long-term peace, based on mutual respect and recognition.

The General Assembly must continue to play a significant role in supporting this process. The Secretary-General has pledged the full support of the United Nations family for the renewed commitment to peace. If we really want to succeed — to achieve lasting peace — I encourage all parties to learn from the mistakes of the past and confront the causes of failure. True reconciliation requires not only an end to hostilities but also a change of attitude.

Some people believe that to make peace is to forget. As I mentioned this morning to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to reconcile is a fair compromise between remembering and forgetting.

The hard work must now begin in preparation for the next major meeting of the parties in Moscow on 12 December.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, permit me, at the outset, to express my sincere appreciation to all representatives of Member States, observers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, United Nations organs, funds and programmes, and members of civil society, who participated this morning in the solemn meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Their impressive presence at this ceremony is eloquent proof that the question of Palestine remains one of the major priorities of the United Nations and that the effective exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights continues to have particular importance.

Today marks the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II). By this important resolution the United Nations decided on the partition of Palestine into two independent States, one Arab and one Jewish, with an international regime for the City of Jerusalem. With this historic decision, the United Nations also took upon itself the permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until this question could be resolved in all its aspects, in

accordance with strict respect for international legitimacy.

Since then, the involvement of various United Nations organs and entities has been growing, assuring the Palestinian people that it would not be abandoned by the international community until it could achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to this issue.

Our Committee is at the centre of our universal Organization's efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and is determined to pursue its important mission, entrusted to it by the General Assembly. The Committee's position is that the continuing illegal occupation of Palestinian territory remains the root cause of the conflict. It reaffirms the urgent need for a negotiated solution that will end the occupation, ensure the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and guarantee security for the State of Israel. This settlement must be based on international law, General Assembly resolution 194 (III), Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and other relevant United Nations resolutions, and the principles outlined in the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which constitute the unanimously accepted terms of reference for the settlement of the question of Palestine.

Our Committee is encouraged by the latest diplomatic efforts aimed at revitalizing the peace process. In this connection, we are hopeful, judging by the results, that the Annapolis conference will open the avenue to serious and constructive permanent status negotiations, in particular the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in security and in peace. It is important that the members of the Quartet, their regional partners and the main actors on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East participate fully in the initiative that has just been launched and help it to become a reality without delay.

The Committee is nevertheless very concerned about the unacceptably precarious situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The Palestinian people of the Gaza Strip have been the most affected, although all Palestinian people daily suffer hardship and humiliation as a direct consequence of the policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power.

The construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank and the presence of over 400,000 Jewish settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories are violations of international law — a fact that is often overlooked by major media organizations and is rarely noticed by the public. The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice with regard to the construction of the separation wall in the occupied West Bank and around East Jerusalem has not been implemented in the three years since its issuance by the Court. Moreover, in the past 40 years, the occupying Power has never met its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. The fundamental rights of the civilian Palestinian population are routinely violated. Palestinian civilians are the main victims of Israeli military operations in their towns and villages.

The Committee resolutely condemns any activities indiscriminately targeting civilians, either by the Israeli army or by Palestinian militias firing mortars and rockets at Israeli cities. Such attacks by both sides must end immediately, and those responsible must be brought to justice.

In addition, the Committee is alarmed by Israel's declaration of the Gaza Strip as hostile territory and by the introduction of repressive new sanctions, including the decision to reduce the supply of fuel and electricity. Such measures, which amount to collective punishment against the population of the Gaza Strip, contravene international humanitarian law.

The sealing off of the Gaza Strip, the continuation of Israeli incursions into Palestinian population centres and the humiliating system of checkpoints throughout the West Bank have heightened the frustration of Palestinian society. The Committee calls upon the Palestinian leadership, the leaders of all factions and all Palestinians to unite in support of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, as well as to resolve their political differences by peaceful means.

The Committee also calls for a return to the situation in the Gaza Strip prior to the events of June 2007 and for the preservation of the territorial unity and integrity of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

At this critical time, I call upon the Government of Israel to refrain from all actions that may destabilize the situation further, in particular the disproportionate use of military force and settlement activities, including the building of settlements on the pretext of so-called natural growth in existing settlements. Israel

must also stop the illegal construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. As the occupying Power, Israel must work to significantly improve the humanitarian situation of Palestinians by lifting curfews, ease the restrictions imposed on the movement of persons and goods and resume paying the tax remittances to the Palestinian Authority that it has been withholding unjustifiably.

The Committee firmly believes that the United Nations should continue to maintain its permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine, until that question has been effectively resolved in all its aspects in strict accordance with international legitimacy. The Committee calls on the Security Council to act decisively to implement its own resolutions on the question of Palestine, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Committee also expects that the Security Council, the Organization's principal organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, will live up to its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. For its part, the Committee will continue to fulfil its General Assembly mandate aimed at helping the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

With regard to the four draft resolutions to be adopted under this agenda item, I would like to inform the Assembly that the sponsors have asked for enough time to be able to update the text of some of the draft resolutions so as to reflect political developments of recent days. I shall introduce the draft resolutions at a date to be announced later.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saviour Borg of Malta, in his capacity as the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the report contained in document A/62/35.

Mr. Borg (Malta): It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, which is contained in document A/62/35.

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report I am about to introduce covers the developments relating to the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report through 5 October of this year.

The report's introduction outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on events that took place in the course of the year. Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, including those of the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine and the relevant political developments monitored by the Committee during the year. That includes Israeli military incursions into the Gaza Strip and military operations in the West Bank, which resulted in a large number of deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians; the restrictions on movement imposed by Israel in the West Bank, which affect every aspect of Palestinian life; the continued construction of the wall in disregard of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and illegal settlement activities; the internal situation in the Gaza Strip, which is having an adverse effect on the humanitarian situation and the provision of humanitarian aid; and the decision of the Israeli Security Cabinet in August to consider the Gaza Strip hostile territory and to apply additional sanctions to the territory.

The chapter also addresses other issues of concern, including the unacceptably high poverty rates among the Palestinian population, the numerous Palestinians remaining in Israeli jails, the decreasing water supply in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in carrying out its mandate. In this chapter, the Committee denounces the excessive and indiscriminate use of force, extrajudicial killings, the destruction of Palestinian homes, civilian infrastructure and agricultural lands and the attendant devastating effects on the Palestinian civilian population. At the same time, it strongly condemns all attacks against Israeli civilians.

The political developments reviewed in this chapter include the adoption of the Riyadh Declaration, endorsing the Arab Peace Initiative, at a meeting of Arab Foreign Ministers; the appointment of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair as Quartet Special

Representative; the reactivation of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee to oversee assistance management, financial support to the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian institutional reform; and international efforts, led by the President of the United States, to revitalize the political process.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action in the General Assembly and the Security Council, as well as statements issued by the Bureau of the Committee. Section B contains a detailed account of the implementation of the work programmes of the Committee and the Division. It provides information regarding the continued dialogue and cooperation between the Committee and the European Union and its member States, as well as with other inter-governmental organizations. Sub-section 1 gives an account of the various international meetings and conferences organized over the course of the year. This section also deals with the Committee's cooperation with civil society, the research, monitoring and publications work of the Division, the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done during the year by the Department of Public Information pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/24 of 1 December 2006.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this chapter, the Committee emphasizes that the occupation, now in its forty-first year, is the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that the continued closures, the sealing off of the Gaza Strip, the Israeli incursions into Palestinian population centres and the humiliating system of checkpoints throughout the West Bank have had a most destructive effect on the lives of the Palestinian people and have rendered the Palestinian Authority nearly dysfunctional.

The Committee calls upon Israel to end its military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory and to put an end to any other measures that further undermine Palestinian institutions. It once again reminds Israel, the occupying Power, that it is bound by the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which obliges the parties to protect civilians during hostilities.

The Committee also strongly condemns the killing of innocent civilians by either side. It denounces rocket attacks on Israel and calls for a cessation of such activities by Palestinian armed groups.

The Committee strongly opposes the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and efforts to complete the construction of the wall. It reiterates its position of principle that those activities are contrary to international humanitarian law and numerous resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted since 1967, as well as the provisions of the Road Map.

The Committee calls upon the Palestinian leadership, the leaders of all factions and all Palestinians to unite in support of President Abbas and the institutions of the Palestinian Authority and to resolve their political differences by peaceful means. The Committee calls for the restoration of the situation in the Gaza Strip to that which existed prior to the June events and for measures to be taken to preserve the territorial unity and integrity of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The Committee reiterates that only a negotiated solution can achieve the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine through the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, based on the 1967 borders. It also reiterates that a settlement should be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) in particular and on other relevant resolutions. The Committee emphasizes that it is incumbent on the Security Council to ensure the speedy and full implementation of its own resolutions. It calls on the Council to decide on effective steps to protect the civilian population, to end hostilities and to guide the parties, with the active involvement of the Quartet and regional actors, to a negotiated settlement.

The Committee notes the steps taken by the Board appointed by the Secretary-General and by its secretariat to commence the mandated work on the United Nations Register of Damage Caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and requests all involved to expedite their efforts to render the Register operational. The Committee also encourages States members of the

European Union to continue to take a more proactive role in international efforts aimed at resolving the conflict.

The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights in support of its mandate aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

The Committee stresses that its programme of international meetings and conferences contributes to focusing the attention of Governments, intergovernmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations and the general public on current issues and the need to promote a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The Committee commends civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion, and for their initiatives aimed at alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people.

The Committee also expresses its intention to continue to involve parliamentarians in its programme of international meetings and conferences. The Committee requests the Division to continue its substantive and secretariat support; its programme of research, monitoring and publications and other informational activities, such as the further expansion and development of UNISPAL, including the graphic enhancement of the "Question of Palestine" website; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The Committee requests that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information be continued, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, the Committee reiterates its goal to make a contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The Committee also calls upon all States to join it in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role, to reconfirm its mandate and to extend its cooperation and support to the Committee.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on this very important issue.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yasir Abdrabou, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Abdrabou (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express our deep gratitude for your wise leadership and excellent stewardship as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. I also wish to express our thanks and appreciation to Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, who conducted the work of the sixty-first session in an excellent manner.

At the same time, it is my pleasure to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to its Chairman, His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, and to all the other officers and members of the Committee. I also wish to thank the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information for their tireless efforts and serious work to promote the Palestinian people's attainment of their inalienable rights and to mobilize international support for their cause.

I would like also to convey our gratitude to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his support for our cause and his efforts to serve the cause of peace.

Sixty years have passed since the 1947 adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which partitioned historic Palestine into two States. One of those two States, Israel, came into being, while the other, Palestine, has yet to see the light of day. Sixty long years have passed, and the question of Palestine remains unresolved and the Palestine remain stateless, deprived of their legitimate inalienable rights, such as the right to self-determination, independence and sovereignty and the right of more than 4 million Palestine refugees to return to their homes and properties.

For the past 40 years, the Palestinian people have continued to suffer under the aggressive and oppressive Israeli military occupation of their land; this is the longest occupation in modern history. They still endure the extensive and flagrant violation of all of their

human rights and the confiscation of their lands, as well as humiliation and constant attacks on their dignity as a people.

In grave violation of international law, Israel, the occupying Power, continues its military aggression against the Palestinian people, including incursions and raids into Palestinian cities, towns, villages and camps as well as excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings, which, over the years, have caused thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of injuries, including among children and women. Israel continues to destroy Palestinian homes, property, infrastructure and agricultural lands. According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, at least 18,000 Palestinian homes have been destroyed by Israel since 1967, leaving thousands of Palestinian families homeless and displaced.

Israel also continues to entrench its occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, through the construction and expansion of illegal colonial settlements. Currently, more than 450,000 Israeli settlers live in the more than 150 settlements constructed on Palestinian lands confiscated by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory. Early last month, Israel ordered the confiscation of at least 110 hectares of Palestinian land adjacent to four Palestinian villages in an area outside occupied East Jerusalem. The confiscation of this large tract of Palestinian land will facilitate the creation of a contiguous settlement bloc in that area, while simultaneously preventing Palestinian territorial contiguity between the area of occupied East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley and between the north and south of the West Bank.

Israel continues to construct the enormous apartheid annexation wall in the West Bank, including, in particular, in and around East Jerusalem. This has walled in Palestinian cities, towns and villages and transformed them into massive prisons and ghettos. On its official website, the Israeli Government has posted a new map of the apartheid wall that shows its vast length and the actual annexation of huge areas of Palestinian land.

The new route of the wall confirms previous reports that Prime Minister Olmert had ordered changes to the route of the wall in order to encompass more illegal Israeli settlements and more Palestinian land in the northern, central and southern West Bank. This constitutes a flagrant and deliberate violation of international law and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and is in continuation of the unilateral de facto policy pursued by successive Israeli Governments. The new route of the wall will actually increase the area of land that Israel is attempting to annex from 9 per cent to 12 per cent, half of which is in and around occupied East Jerusalem.

The illegal Israeli settlement campaign and the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, not only constitutes an obstacle to the achievement of a just and lasting peace between the two peoples, but also constitutes a hard blow to all true prospects for the establishment of a contiguous and viable Palestinian State.

As a result of all these measures and practices, the city of Jerusalem is suffering under the imposition of a suffocating siege and the attempts to surround it with the wall. That structure is isolating the city from the surrounding localities, including Bethlehem, restricting the access of both Muslim and Christian civilians to the city and preventing them from exercising their right to visit and worship at their holy places. Furthermore, the occupying Power continues to carry out many measures intended to Judaize the Holy City and to change its legal status, its historical and cultural character and its demographic composition.

Israel also continues to unlawfully detain and imprison approximately 11,000 Palestinians, including children, women and a number of officials and parliamentarians. Most of these prisoners and detainees are being held in inhumane conditions and being subjected to harsh physical and mental treatment, including acts of torture.

Moreover, Israel continues to impose all manner of collective punishment on the Palestinian people, including severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods within the occupied Palestinian territory and between it and the outside world, through prolonged closures and the establishment of more than 550 checkpoints and roadblocks. These measures fragment the contiguity and unity of the occupied Palestinian territory, transforming it into scattered and isolated Bantustans. At the same time, since it declared the Gaza Strip a "hostile entity" in September, Israel has continued to close all border crossings into and out of the Gaza Strip and to tighten its siege of that part of the occupied Palestinian territory. These illegal

measures of collective punishment have caused the tragic humanitarian situation of Palestinian civilians to deteriorate even further.

In addition to constituting serious violations and grave breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, these Israeli measures and practices are contradictory to the types of confidence-building measures that must be taken in order to continue and support the peace process and move it forward. When we speak of these illegal Israeli policies and practices, we are speaking of actual realities on the ground. As depressing, negative and frustrating as these facts may be — and as repetitive as it may sound to describe the pain that they have caused — they are the tragic realities being experienced by the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation. We must constantly draw the international community's attention to this situation until all such Israeli violations cease and until Israel complies with its legal obligations under international law and United Nations resolutions.

In recent years, the peace process has remained stagnant because of Israel's decision to prevent any progress from being made in the peace process and to undermine all efforts to resume dialogue and negotiations between the two sides on a final, just and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflict on the basis of international law, United Nations resolutions and the two-State solution.

The international Conference just held at Annapolis was successful because of the great efforts of the international community. That success was reflected in the large number of countries participating in the Conference and the exceptional efforts of the host country, the United States of America, the Quartet and Arab nations. Sixteen Arab States were in attendance, together with a number of other Islamic countries, members of the European Union, Japan and other Asian countries, African countries and a number of countries representing the Non-Aligned Movement. We hope that the Annapolis Conference will serve as an important basis for the donor conference to be held next month in Paris, as well as the political and economic activities that could result from it.

Yesterday, following the Annapolis Conference, negotiations between the two sides officially began on all final-status issues in order to find a just solution that will ensure respect for the rights of our people under occupation, who aspire to freedom and independence, and for those of our refugees, who seek to return to their homes and property. We reiterate once again that Israel must comply with all its obligations and requirements. All illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, must come to an immediate end. The dismantlement and removal of settlement outposts must begin immediately, and the construction of the apartheid annexation wall must immediately cease and the parts already built must be dismantled, as called for in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Checkpoints and roadblocks must be removed, and crossings must be opened. Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem that have been shut down must be allowed to reopen. Prisoners and detainees must be allowed to return to their homes and families.

There must be full respect for the Annapolis Joint Statement if a peace agreement is to be reached by the end of 2008 on the basis of the well-known terms of reference, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the principle of land for peace. Moreover, when we emphasize the need to resolve the Palestine question in all its aspects, we are affirming that any efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace in the region must also address the question of the occupied Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories.

At this critical stage, we must confront any attempts to undermine the exceptional opportunity that lies before us or to obstruct it by adopting narrow positions and agendas in order to maintain the status quo, which would have a deeply negative, detrimental and long-term impact on the situation throughout the region. Too much time has already passed. We must move beyond mere statements; more than good intentions is needed to achieve peace. The international community must take strong, principled and effective positions and decisive measures, redoubling its efforts to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, and to Israel's repeated and flagrant violations. The Palestinian people must enjoy freedom and exercise their inalienable right to self-determination in an independent State of their own with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and full realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, including the right of Palestinian refugees to

return, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. International law and justice must be upheld so that peace can truly prevail.

An historic opportunity lies before us, and all those who want peace must seize this opportunity. There must be respect for international law. Political will and determination must push this process forward to overcome all of the obstacles and impediments that we currently face. Peace should be pursued through long-awaited and serious negotiations between the two sides on final status issues, including borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and security. These are the core issues to which solutions must be found so as to enable the establishment of a Palestinian State and achievement of the peace that we are all striving for in the Middle East.

It is with bitterness and sadness that we must refer to the regrettable events that occurred in the Gaza Strip this past June. In that regard, we affirm the necessity of restoring the situation in the Gaza Strip to the status quo that existed prior to the events of June 2007 and of restoring the legitimacy of the Palestinian National Authority institutions under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and of allowing for a dialogue between all Palestinian factions to restore our national unity and to preserve the unity, contiguity and integrity of the Palestinian Territory, a situation to which all of the Palestinian people aspire. The Palestinian land is one land and the Palestinian people are one people and will never be divided.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the immense gratitude and appreciation of the Palestinian people for all of the support and solidarity extended to them over the years by the international community, including by the United Nations. The Palestinian people continue to hope for the continued support and assistance of the international community, which they need more than ever at this time. In that connection, we express our hope that all countries will vote in favour of all of the draft resolutions submitted under the agenda items on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East and all other draft resolutions relevant to Palestine that will come before the Assembly.

We are firmly convinced that all free and peace-loving nations of the world stand for justice and fairness and support the question of Palestine because it is a just and noble cause and because these nations too wish to see an end the suffering and pain of our people through realization of their rights, freedom and an independent State of Palestine, and to see an end to decades of occupation, conflict and cycles of violence in the Middle East region. The Palestinian people, wish to witness and celebrate the flourishing of peace, security, stability, justice and prosperity for all the peoples of the region. Let us work together without delay to make the vision and goal of peace and justice a reality and a fact of life.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Today we are commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a date on which the international community reaffirms its support of this heroic people's efforts to exercise its inalienable right to self-determination and to achieve independence and freedom. Today, we recall that the Palestinian people have for nearly 60 years suffered from alienation, statelessness, dispossession and dispersal in exile, awaiting fulfilment of their right to return to their lands. They have suffered for more than 40 years under a brutal foreign occupation and have been denied their inalienable human rights. On this occasion we must pledge to redouble our efforts to bring an end to that injustice by exerting the necessary efforts to resolve the question of Palestine in all its aspects and to achieve the peace and justice that are long overdue.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its grave concern over the constant deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly as a result of the excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population and its many other illegal policies and practices.

NAM condemns the prolonged Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 and expresses grave concern over the distressing developments in the recent period. For four decades, Israel has been unrelentingly violating international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, in its actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. During that time, the occupying Power has been committing grave human rights violations against the Palestinian people, including war crimes.

Moreover, for four decades Israel has carried out deliberate and unlawful policies and practices aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and nature of the Palestinian land and the de facto annexation of that land, particularly via measures such as the confiscation of large areas of Palestinian land, implementation of its illegal colonial settlement policy and, since 2003, the illegal construction of a wall in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem. The occupying Power continues to pursue those illegal policies and measures to this day in total disrespect for and in contravention of international law, including in particular the Geneva Convention, United Nations resolutions and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004.

In addition, Israel continues to impose a humiliating and discriminatory network of hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, seriously fragmenting and undermining the contiguity and integrity of the territory and completely isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, to impose closures, to seal off the Gaza Strip, to arrest and detain thousands of Palestinian civilians and to carry out forceful military raids and incursions into Palestinian population centres, causing extensive loss of life and injury to Palestinian civilians, including children, and the deliberate and widespread destruction of property and land.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns all such illegal actions by Israel, the occupying Power, and calls for their immediate cessation. Furthermore, NAM believes that these illegal Israeli actions, including ongoing military attacks, have seriously undermined the functioning of the Palestinian Authority and have undoubtedly contributed to the growing polarization of the Palestinian society. NAM expresses hope for the speedy restoration of Palestinian national unity, which is important for the achievement of the legitimate national aspirations and goals of the Palestinian people.

NAM underscores the severity of the situation being faced by the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip resulting from the suffocating siege and closure of all of its crossings by Israel, the occupying Power. Such unlawful collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population by Israel has caused the further deterioration of socio-economic conditions, leading to the widespread incidence of poverty and hunger, and has caused the humanitarian situation to continue to deteriorate to deeply disturbing levels. Israel, the occupying Power, must respect its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and cease all such illegal and inhumane practices against the Palestinian people in Gaza.

In a dangerous development of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, Israel's Security Cabinet decided to declare the occupied Gaza Strip as a hostile territory, declaring its intention to cut off power and fuel supplies to the already isolated and imprisoned Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip. That cruel decision by Israel amounts to a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, and the collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip. It is totally unjustifiable under any pretext and should be condemned. Israel, the occupying Power, should comply with its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In that connection, it must be emphasized that the Gaza Strip clearly remains a part of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Non-Aligned Movement calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to halt its grave violations of international law and to scrupulously abide by international humanitarian law, by which it is bound as an occupying Power.

In that regard, the Movement calls for the opening of all crossings to allow for the movement of persons and goods, access to supplies and movement of humanitarian personnel, including those of the United Nations agencies on the ground. Moreover, the Non-Aligned Movement calls for Israel to fulfil its responsibility to repair all damage caused to the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip. Today, we also call upon all States and the international community as a whole to urgently provide economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people during this critical period in order to alleviate the current financial and humanitarian crisis they continue to face.

The countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement, once again call upon the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and take the necessary actions to fulfil its own resolutions and the necessary steps to compel Israel to respect international law and end its occupation and the illegitimate and illegal

practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It is unacceptable that the Security Council, which holds the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, is still failing to fulfil its permanent responsibility regarding the Palestinian question, while it has not been solved in all its aspects on the basis of international law.

The unilateral measures applied by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are a serious threat to the prospects for peace and the possibility of achieving a negotiated agreement, based on the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

The Non-Aligned Movement sincerely hopes that the international meeting held this week in Annapolis will effectively contribute to the efforts by the international community to re-launch the Middle East peace process with the aim of addressing all the fundamental issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. The peaceful resolution of both those conflicts is of the highest importance to all the members of Non-Aligned Movement and of critical importance to international peace and security.

In that regard, the Movement reaffirms the importance and central role of international law, United Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

The Non-Aligned Movement acknowledges the common understanding reached by the Israeli and Palestinian sides at the Annapolis meeting and stresses the urgency of resuming direct, substantive and accelerated negotiations between the parties that will address all territorial final status issues and will ultimately put an end to the occupation of all Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 that remain occupied, namely the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan. Such negotiations should lead to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within which the Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable right to self-determination as a free people and enjoy all of their fundamental human rights, and to the achievement of a just solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III) and international law.

The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to support the Palestinian people and its leadership in order to bring an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

On this occasion, we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I have the honour to speak in this important debate on behalf of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). At the outset, I wish to express our appreciation to Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his outstanding leadership of the Committee.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference, in its various declarations, communiqués and resolutions, has spelled out and reaffirmed its positions on the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the basis and principles for achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Most recently, the 34th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, held in Islamabad in May, and the Annual Coordination Meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers, held in New York in September, reiterated those positions in support of a comprehensive peace on all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The OIC calls for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as agreed principles. They require Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan; the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and sovereignty in their independent and viable State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital; and a just resolution to the plight of the Palestinian

refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

The unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular the core issue of Palestine, constitutes a grave and persistent threat to international peace and security, especially after 40 years of foreign occupation. This cauldron of conflict has, over the decades, resulted in widespread death and destruction, caused misery, aroused anger and frustration and bred mistrust and antagonism between Israel and the Arab and Islamic world.

The Islamic world has a natural and strong emotional attachment to the issue of Palestine and a deep commitment to its just and peaceful settlement. The centrality of the cause of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for the entire Islamic ummah should be clear to all. Hopes for peace have been dashed repeatedly by Israel's prolongation of its illegal occupation of Arab territories and its propensity to resort to the threat and use of force. The Muslim world has been disappointed in particular by the inability, and at times partiality and unwillingness, on the part of the great Powers to promote just and durable solutions to the several crises in the Middle East. International law has been allowed to be violated with impunity. The resolutions of the Security Council and other United Nations bodies, including the Assembly, remain unimplemented. Apathy, discrimination and double standards have themselves become a major underlying cause of the mistrust and misunderstanding between the Islamic and the Western worlds.

This is an unfortunate and unnecessary situation. It is clear that the tragedy and oppression of the Palestinian people and the suffering, humiliation and human rights violations have touched the conscience of common people all over the world. The just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and freedom from foreign occupation enjoys the strong support and solidarity of the entire international community. It goes beyond religious group or regional affiliations.

This debate of the General Assembly, which coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and takes place 60 years after the adoption of resolution 181 (II) and the Palestinian *Nakba*, that is, the great catastrophe, has demonstrated the wide support that exists for the Palestinian cause.

The central conclusions emanating from the discussions in the Assembly and its committees are clear. The root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories. An end to that occupation of all Arab territories is therefore a necessary prerequisite for peace. The world can no longer afford to allow the multiple conflicts in the Middle East to fester. There is a unanimous desire for an early, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. A just and final settlement of the core dispute of Palestine is imperative in order to achieve such a comprehensive Middle East peace. There is wide consensus it must be a pacific settlement, reached through dialogue and negotiations.

While the craving for peace is intensifying, the futility of the use of force to achieve durable solutions has also become evident. It is now incumbent on the international community to translate that desire for a negotiated settlement into reality. We welcome all recent regional and international efforts, including the revival of the Arab Peace Initiative and the Conference on the Middle East hosted by the United States in Annapolis on 27 November. We hope the Annapolis meeting will be the beginning of the end of the tragedy of Palestine and a dawn of peace in the Holy Land. The Islamic countries participated in the Annapolis Conference in response to the invitation from the United States to signal their commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine and in the Middle East.

We welcome the commitment to the establishment of the Palestinian State and the agreement to start final status negotiations to resolve all core issues, including borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem. In order to be fair, those issues must be resolved on the basis of previous agreements, especially the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Peace Conference terms of reference, the Quartet's Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. That will also entail Israeli withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We hope a peace treaty will be finalized before the end of 2008 and will then be implemented quickly and earnestly. Delay and obstruction could exacerbate rather than enhance the prospect for peace.

Last week marked the fortieth anniversary of adoption of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). The provisions and principles for a just and lasting

settlement set out in that resolution remain fundamental and relevant today: the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war; the withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the 1967 conflict; and a just settlement of the refugee problem. We also believe that a peace agreement concluded through the negotiations launched in Annapolis will need to be supplemented by appropriate mechanisms and guarantees for their fair and full implementation by all sides. The Council and the General Assembly must play their rightful roles in that regard.

Meanwhile, it is important to build an environment of trust and confidence to support the peace process. We remain deeply concerned over the continuing plight of the Palestinian people and their continuing humiliation and collective punishment under Israeli occupation. The Palestinian people continue to be the victims of violence and military aggression, grave human rights violations and socio-economic deprivation and strangulation, which affect all aspects of their lives. The dire situation in the occupied territories is depicted in detail in various United Nations and other reports. The international community must ensure full compliance by Israel of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to all the occupied territories. Israel must also end policies and actions that seek to change the realities on ground and thus prejudice a final settlement, including the integrity and viability of a future Palestinian state.

There are certain immediate requirements to create the conditions necessary for the success of negotiations for peace in the Middle East. They include, first, bringing about a rapid and tangible improvement of the situation on the ground in the occupied territories; ending the oppression and suffering of the Palestinian people; a cessation of military campaigns by Israel; a release of political prisoners; a halt to the construction of the illegal separation wall; a freeze on settlement activities; the dismantling of unauthorized settler outposts; the removal of all kinds of blockades and restrictions; an end to the siege of Gaza and its illegal declaration by Israel as an enemy entity; and an end to violence.

Secondly, enhanced humanitarian, economic and social support must be provided to the Palestinians from the international community, including an immediate restoration and unimpeded provision of all essential goods and services to the Palestinian people in all the occupied territories.

Thirdly, support must be provided to the Palestinian Authority to enable it to build State institutions, including its security apparatus. We look forward, in that context, to a successful donors conference in Paris to respond to the requirements of the Palestinian people.

Obviously, together with the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, efforts must continue to revive Palestinian unity. Durable peace is impossible with a divided people. An essential step to reaching reconciliation is for the situation that exists on the ground in Gaza to return to that which existed prior to the events of June 2007.

The discussions in Annapolis also recognized the crucial importance of addressing all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks, in order to achieve comprehensive peace. We hope to see progress on those parallel tracks to reach a just and durable settlement. Israel must withdraw completely from Lebanese land and the occupied Syrian Golan and comply fully with Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

Today, we are at yet another crucial juncture in the search for a lasting peace in the Middle East. As the leaders have declared in Annapolis, the time is ripe for concluding peace. But time is not unlimited. The consequences of failure would be grave: a rise of extremism and violence that could engulf the entire Middle East.

An early comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the core issue of Palestine, must be our collective strategic objective. All Member States must pledge complete commitment to that objective and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Indeed, that would have a positive impact on regional and international peace and security and help stabilize other simmering situations in the region. While remaining fully committed to the just cause of the Palestinian people, OIC will play its rightful role in the collective endeavour to establish lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Outlule (Botswana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's support for the content of the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The Assembly meets today to consider the question of Palestine amid a cautious optimism regarding the efforts that were made to move the peace process forward on the Palestinian-Israeli track, aiming at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State on the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, including occupied East Jerusalem, before the end of 2008. Today's meeting comes one day after the international Annapolis Conference was held to re-launch Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, to reach a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, amid growing international efforts to achieve similar progress on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, and to bring about a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict within the same time frame.

If the Annapolis Conference was only a first step on the way to reviving the peace process and launching the final status negotiations, the success of such efforts will require strong political will and sincere and continuous efforts from Israel to reach a final agreement on the six final status core issues, including Jerusalem and the return of the refugees, without procrastination or attempts to win time while imposing a de facto situation. That requires setting a specific timetable for implementing commitments, monitored by an active international follow-up mechanism, in the framework of the implementation of the Road Map under the auspices of the international Quartet, in order to ensure the progress of negotiations in the right direction and within a definite time frame.

In that context, the Assembly's consideration of the question of Palestine today has special importance, since it provides the support of the most democratic and representative organ of the United Nations for the rights of the people of Palestine and the legitimate endeavour to realize a peaceful and just settlement of that question through the ending of the occupation, the establishment of the independent State of Palestine and the provision to Palestinian civilians of protection from the oppression of the occupation. That requires enhancement of the Assembly's role in addressing the question of Palestine and realizing the legitimate hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people, alongside intensification of international efforts to reach the results aspired to on all levels by establishing the Palestinian State by the end of 2008.

Similarly, enhancing the Assembly's ability to deepen international respect for human rights in a framework free from selectivity, politicization and double standards requires us to redouble our efforts to ensure respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people until the establishment of their own independent State, through effective measures and procedures that guarantee an end to the systematic violations of international law and international humanitarian law by the occupying Power and its repeated aggressions against Palestinian civilians. That will break the international silence prevailing on the subject of extrajudicial killings, continuous closure of crossing points and blockades of roads, collective punishment, threats to cut off water and electricity supplies and all means of survival in the Gaza Strip, expansion of settlements, confiscation of land and construction of the separation wall in the occupied West Bank in breach of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and resolution ES-10/17 of the Tenth Emergency Special Session of the Assembly. Israel rejects the implementation of that resolution, thus ignoring the international community's will and the rules of international legitimacy.

Egypt believes that the success of the new negotiation track between the Palestinian and the Israeli parties after the Annapolis Conference requires the immediate implementation of a number of confidence-building measures and procedures under the supervision of the international community, in order to reach a final and permanent solution to the question of Palestine according to the relevant international terms of reference. Those are, primarily, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), Assembly resolution 194 (III), the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

In that context, we renew our call to Israel to cease its practices of collective punishment in the West Bank and Gaza and to return to the borders of 28 September 2000 as a confidence-building initiative. We also call upon the Quartet to fulfil its responsibility more effectively by monitoring both parties' level of implementation of their commitments to the peace process. We look forward to an active role being

undertaken by the United Nations, as a member of the Quartet, in ensuring the establishment of an independent Palestinian State before the end of 2008.

In addition to the efforts of the international community and the concerned regional parties, both the Israeli and Palestinian sides have the responsibility to support steps aimed at restoring confidence, through the parallel implementation of the first phase of the Road Map; an end to the settlement policy; the release of the Palestinian prisoners and officials detained in Israeli prisons; the re-opening of Palestinian Authority institutions in East Jerusalem; an end to the firing of rockets by both sides, against Palestinian civilians on the one hand and against civilian Israeli areas on the other; and the release of the abducted Israeli soldier.

We welcome in that context the political will expressed by President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert towards supporting efforts to reach a settlement. We look forward to the launching of the final status negotiations that will represent a starting point for breaking the cycle of violence and counter-violence and changing the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians on the ground, in order to restore their trust in the peace process and to allow them to feel that there is a positive and peaceful outcome to build upon.

In addition to supporting endeavours to move the peace process forward and participate effectively in the launching of the final status negotiations, Egypt looks forward to the donors conference to be held in Paris in order to provide the necessary economic support for the Palestinian people. Egypt has spared no effort to support all endeavours to achieve the unity of the Palestinian people and to maintain the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory in the West Bank and Gaza as one politically integrated unit of people. We hope that when we consider this item at the next session, an agreement will have been achieved regarding the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Happy birthday, Mr. President. I know those words evoke a different voice and a different president, but, with all seriousness, happy birthday. On this day, 60 years ago, the Jewish State was born, out of the historic 1947 session of the General Assembly, at which two extraordinary gifts were given to humanity: the gift of a modern State for the Jewish people and the gift of Israel to the world.

I have just come from a commemorative ceremony at Lake Success, where the United Nations met 60 years ago. You see, throughout history, nations traditionally have been created through war and conquest. Israel, however, was created by United Nations decree and by the nations of the world. To be there at Lake Success today, just a few hours ago, representing my Government and my people, was indeed a joyous occasion. I wish you all a happy birthday.

Late last night, I returned from Annapolis. It was a memorable occasion, with representatives from over 40 nations — chief among them moderate States of the Arab and Muslim world — committed to supporting the bilateral process between Israel and the Palestinians and committed to supporting moderation and marginalizing extremism. The air in Annapolis was filled with the hope that, by working together, we can realize a peaceful and better tomorrow. I have no doubt that that sense of optimism was felt by all those in attendance.

Yet, back here in New York, standing before this Assembly, in a place so distant from Annapolis in body, mind and soul, I cannot help but wonder whether today's debate will contribute to the spirit, promise and hope of Annapolis. After all, this Assembly Hall is also the birthplace of the 21 annual resolutions defaming Israel with a litany of predetermined, impractical and completely biased conclusions that have only given the Palestinians a fictitious sense of reality and a discourse of rights without responsibilities, both of which render the United Nations completely incapable of playing a meaningful role in addressing the conflict.

Today, 29 November, is perhaps the greatest example of how this Assembly continues to stifle hope and faith for peace in our region. According to the calendar of the United Nations, today is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which by definition precludes Israel.

Let me be clear: Palestinian self-determination is a cause Israel wholeheartedly supports. Indeed, at the Annapolis meeting, just two days ago, my Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Olmert, said:

> "We will find the right way, as part of an international effort in which we will participate, to assist these Palestinians in finding a proper framework for their future, in the Palestinian state

which will be established in the territories agreed upon between us".

Over the years, however, the proceedings held in this Hall and at United Nations centres around the world have corrupted the cause of Palestinian self—determination and transformed it into a denigration and defamation of the Jewish State.

I have been listening carefully to some of the statements delivered this afternoon, and I know many of them will follow. They all focused on Israel. The narrative is the same: it is unjust, draining, grossly erroneous, misleading andm I daresay, viciously boring. It is sadly, yet again, a sense of déja-vu all over again. The penchant for blaming Israel for the repeated Palestinian failures is so widespread and contagious that the absurdity of it goes completely unnoticed. Today reminds us why that is so: the Palestinian addiction to the culture of victimhood is fed by this world body and specifically many of its Member States, as we have just witnessed. Day after day, week after week, month after month and indeed year after year, they use this international forum for their rhetorical theatrics. Broadway might have been on strike until today, but the theatre on the East River is always open for business. It is time to close the gap between the reality on the ground and the rhetoric in this Hall now, forever and once and for all.

For us — for Jews and for Israelis — today is not a bitter day at all. We are not downtrodden or haunted by vanquished dreams. Today is a day of great victory and success — victory over oppression and tyranny and success over the painful tragedies and suffering of Jewish history. Today, we celebrate the resilience of the Jewish people and our eternal bond to the land of Israel, where after so many years of yearning and longing in exile, we merited the return to our homeland.

The joy felt on 29 November 1947, exactly 60 years ago is recounted by Amos Oz, one of Israel's most celebrated writers and a candidate for the Nobel Prize in literature:

> "There was dancing and weeping .... Bottles of fruit drink, beer and wine passed from hand to hand and mouth to mouth, strangers hugged each other in streets and kissed each other with tears .... frenzied revelers ... waved the flag of the state that had not been established yet, but tonight, over there in Lake Success, it had been decided that it had the right to be established".

Travel to any city in Israel and you will no doubt find a street named for this very day, Kaftet be-November, 29 November, a testament to its importance and significance to our people. In fact, I live in Tel Aviv just yards from a street named after 29 November, and my eldest grandson, Ron, was born on this very date, nine years ago. It is on his behalf and on behalf of all the children of Israel and all the children of the region that I stand before you here today.

Think of the past 60 years rand consider Israel's many contributions to the world in the fields of science and technology, medicine, art and culture. It is a country that has discovered ways to stop deserts from advancing; a country that has engineered critical advancements in medicine, cures for illnesses and limbs for the disabled; and a country that has endowed the world with rich treasures of art and culture, through its Nobel Laureates, poets, artists and writers.

Think about where the world would be today without the State of Israel — and I know some in this Hall perversely dream about such a question. But Israel is here to stay, to flourish and to continue to contribute to the advancement of man, progress and human civilization. It is then the greatest insult to us, to history and to this Assembly that while Israel celebrates, others at the United Nations mourn.

Some Member States will note my delegation's absence from past 29 November proceedings. We stopped addressing this Assembly because some Member States hijacked and abused the forum for their own political interests and turned it into yet another venue to demonize Israel. We cannot allow that to happen any longer. Today is our day. It is high time for Israel and for all those committed to peace in our region to reclaim this day for what it truly means: the peaceful coexistence of two independent States in the region, a Jewish State and a Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security, each fulfilling the national aspirations of its respective people.

In that regard, it is all the more bewildering that, of late, the Jewish character of the State of Israel has been called into question. Last week, as Israelis and Palestinians set out for Annapolis, a veteran Palestinian negotiator said the Palestinians will never acknowledge Israel's Jewish identity.

The resolution that gives 29 November significance, resolution 181 (II), speaks of the creation of the "Jewish State" no less than 25 times. Even before that, the notion of a Jewish State in the land of Israel was cemented in the 1922 League of Nations British Mandate on Palestine, which put into effect the Balfour Declaration of 1917 to establish a national home for the Jewish people.

The Arab refusal to recognize the existence of our Jewish State has been at the core of the Palestinians' inability to achieve a State of their own. When the Jews accepted the United Nations partition plan, the Arabs made a fateful — and indeed fatal — choice to reject it and invade the newly born Jewish State, rather than coexist with it.

Had the Arabs accepted the decision of the United Nations, there would have been two States, one Jewish and one Arab, all this time, for the past 60 years. Had the Arabs not rejected the decision, my Palestinian colleague who spoke earlier would have represented a Member State, not just an observer entity.

The wrong choices did not end in 1947. We saw them again in 1967, 1973, 2000 and 2005, when Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip only to have the Palestinians bring the Hamas terrorists to power. The wrong choices of the Palestinians continue until this very day, when, on average, Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip fire rockets at Israel every three hours.

For their brutal violence, arrogance and intransigence, Israel has paid an enormous price, with the lives of our people: the Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorism, men, women and children, young and old, doctors and lawyers, artists and scientists, all who would have contributed so greatly to life in Israel and to the betterment of the entire world.

The terrorism we still see today stems from an innate refusal to recognize Israel, a refusal to recognize the Jewish State and a refusal to recognize the value of our lives. So long as there is a denial of the existential issues, I fear there can never be an agreement on the territorial ones.

Annapolis — I hope and believe — represents a new wind of change. Moderate Arab and Muslim States today recognize that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the cause of instability in our region and that the conflict can and will end. They also recognize that the real dangers come directly from Islamic extremism and its champion, Iran, who sponsors terrorism around the globe, tries to attain nuclear weapons and denies the Holocaust while preparing for the next one, relentlessly defying the will of the international community.

The coalition for peace that the world saw assembled in Annapolis just two days ago will support the process between Israel and the Palestinians. But it is also a coalition that will hopefully counter and confront the extremists in Tehran.

I hope that the winds of Annapolis will blow to the north, to this very Hall. For there could be no better time for the nations of the world — and in particular the moderate Arab and Muslim States in this Hall today — to show their commitment to the Israeli-Palestinian process. There could be no better place than here at the United Nations — where for decades Israel has been discriminated against and singled out, contrary to the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations — for Members States to tell Israel and the Palestinians that they support our dialogue.

Allow me to take you back once more to 60 years ago, to 2 October 1947, when David Ben-Gurion, founding father and first Prime Minister of the State of Israel, two months prior to the General Assembly's historic vote, said in Jerusalem:

> "We will not surrender our right to free Aliyah, to rebuild our shattered homeland, to claim statehood. If we are attacked, we will fight back. But we will do everything in our power to maintain peace, and establish cooperation gainful to both. It is now, here and now, from Jerusalem itself, that a call must go out to the Arab nations to join forces with Jewry and the destined Jewish State and work shoulder to shoulder for the common good, for the peace and progress of sovereign equals".

Sixty years later — today, here — Israel's message to the Arab nations and the Palestinians has not changed: shoulder to shoulder for the common good, now, more than ever, with the winds of change blowing strong from Annapolis, to New York, to the Middle East, to all corners of the earth.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the members of the Committee

for the efforts that they are all deploying to implement the mandate of the Committee. The Committee's mandate is to achieve the objectives for which it was established in 1975 by Assembly resolution 3376 (XXX) and the programme of action that seeks to enable the Palestinian people to exercise the rights that were recognized by the Assembly in resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 1974, chief among them being their right to self-determination.

My delegation supports the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

We also express our gratitude to the Committee for its valuable report, contained in document A/62/35, in which it focuses on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the deterioration it has witnessed in the enjoyment of human rights and basic freedoms as a result of the Israeli military incursions into the Gaza Strip, the military operations in the West Bank and their attendant deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians. That caused the Committee to express its deep concern with regard to the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The occupying Power, as the Committee mentions in paragraph 17 of its report, has, ever since its occupation of the Arab territories 40 years ago, sought to change the Palestinian territory by adopting illegal policies and practices.

These include the internationally condemned construction of settlements, the construction of the separation wall, paralysis in the work of the Palestinian Authority as a result of the closures, the isolation of the Gaza Strip, the humiliating system of checkpoints, and the Israeli military operations being carried out against the Palestinian people. These practices were condemned by foreign ministers of the Group of 77 and China in their ministerial declaration of 27 September 2007. They saw those illegal Israeli practices, including the illegal construction of settlements, the wall and the bypass roads, as the root cause of the deterioration of the social and economic conditions of the Palestinian people over the past year.

There is no doubt that the occupying Power's continued construction of the separation wall is in total disregard of the July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which affirmed the applicability to the occupied Palestinian territories of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and of all relevant international agreements and the human rights Conventants of 1966.

A recent report of the Economic and Social Council states that the construction of the wall has a grave humanitarian impact on the Palestinian communities in the West Bank. The wall will be 703 kilometres long, having grown by 33 kilometres since the Israeli Cabinet agreed to a second change in re-routing the wall. It will isolate thousands of Palestinians from their agricultural lands. As stated by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the wall is being constructed in a manner that will isolate more fertile Arab lands and natural resources.

Although the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, through resolution ES-10/17 of 2006, established the United Nations Register of Damage Caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and although the Secretary-General appointed, on 10 May 2007, three international experts to the Board of the Register, Israel's refusal to allow the establishment of an office for the Register in the occupied Palestinian territories has denied the Palestinians the chance to register their claims of damage, which leads to fears that the data that has been compiled may be lost.

In addition to the fact that the separation wall is in flagrant violation of international law, the establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, also breaches international law. That was the conclusion of the International Court of Justice in paragraph 120 of its Advisory Opinion.

The final communiqué of the annual coordination meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, held in New York on 2 October 2007, reiterated its grave condemnation of Israel for its continuing intensive campaign of setteler colonialism and for continuing the continuation of the construction of the separation wall.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has emphasized that the Israeli occupation is the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is in consonance with what

we have consistently repeated with regards to the occupation, which in itself constitutes a violation of human rights. Perhaps what attracts attention is that Israel is bent on entrenching its occupation through building and expanding its settlements. That caused the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, John Dugard, in his report to the Human Rights Council in March 2007, to propose seeking a new opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the long-term occupation.

The sixty-second session of the Assembly is being held after 40 years of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories, which began in 1967. The occupation still pursues the worst policies of inhuman treatment against the Palestinians. The tragedies, setbacks and suffering of the Palestinian people are the result of the policy of isolation, displacement, destruction of houses and siege. Those policies constitute clear and undeniable violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of the human rights of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories. That resulted in the humanitarian crisis that the Palestinians are still enduring. The situation has been deteriorating since September 2000: there has been an increase in poverty and unemployment; the occupying forces have paralysed the infrastructure and reduced water and electricity supplies; and there has been a decrease in food supplies and a shortage of medicine, in the Gaza Strip in particular. This has aggravated the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and could lead to deepened hatred and increased violence and extremism.

In that context, the only solution must be a peaceful political solution, strongly linked to reaching a just settlement of the conflict in conformity with the principle of international legitimacy and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Arab countries have continuously expressed their concern to put an end to this conflict in a peaceful manner that would bring about regional peace and security. They have been deploying all possible efforts to achieve this objective in order to reach a comprehensive, peaceful and just settlement by establishing two States, living side-by-side within safe and recognized borders.

Bahrain therefore welcomed the call of the President of the United States, George Bush, to convene an international conference on peace in the Middle East, which concluded its work yesterday in Annapolis. It is our hope that that meeting will launch a new phase, putting an end to the core problems of the Israeli-Arab conflict. A commitment by all parties to put an end to the conflict will lead to the establishment of real and just peace in the region and a just and lasting settlement, putting an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967. Peace is a strategic option, and there is now an opportunity for peace. We must not miss this opportunity. This peace requires the implementation of United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the implementation of the Road Map, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative and the establishment of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Mansour (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): This meeting in the General Assembly, held on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is special and symbolically very important. It reminds us again of our responsibility vis-à-vis the Palestinian people, of the urgent need to put an end to the daily suffering of the Palistinians and of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian occupied territories.

Furthermore, it comes in the midst of intensified Arab and world action aimed at reviving the peace process and at bringing to an end the crisis in the Middle East.

Given the exacerbation of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, the continuation of difficulties that the Palestinian people are encountering and the restrictions limiting their freedom, which prevents them from exercising their basic rights and deprives them of access to humanitarian assistance — Tunisia would like to reiterate its deep concern vis-à-vis this tragic situation. We call for the lifting of the blockade against the Palestinian people, so as to stop further deterioration of the conditions that they live under in their constant suffering owing to the oppressive practices of the occupying Power.

Tunisia considers the Palestinian issue primary and pivotal and gives it strong and principled support. We have thus called from this forum and other international bodies, and at various international and regional meetings, for immediate and effective

international action to guarantee the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and enable them to have an independent State on their national soil.

Tunisia appreciates the ongoing efforts on the part of the international community on this issue, both in the General Assembly in other international bodies, in particular the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. We support all these efforts and call for their continuation and for serious endeavors aimed at ending the crisis in the region.

In this context, allow me to quote from a statement made by the President of Tunisia, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. He said that Tunisia calls upon the international community and all the influential actors and the Quartet to continue their efforts to let the peace process succeed in line with relevant United Nations resolutions and Arab and international terms of reference, so that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace can be established for the benefit of the people of the region. President Ben Ali, speaking about the need to enable the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights, also said in his statement that Tunisia was hopeful that all efforts would be pooled in order to reactivate the peace process relaunched in Annapolis so that peace and stability can be achieved in the region. Establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in a region that has been suffering from this conflict for too many years means that all the influential parties, in particular the United Nations, should shoulder their responsibility by imposing respect for United Nations resolutions in order to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate rights to freedom, dignity, peace and stability within an independent State on their national soil. Moreover, achieving peace in the region, requires finding a final solution for all the various issues that are still pending, including recovery of occupied Syrian Golan and occupied Lebanese territory.

Tunisia, which has always supported the struggle of the Palestinian people in its just cause, reiterates here its strong solidarity with the Palestinians and their right to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State on their soil. By the same token and as a peace-loving country keen on respecting international legitimacy, Tunisia hopes that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace can be established in a region that has suffered a long-lasting conflict that deprived it of living in security and stability.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Sir, allow me to align myself with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the statement made by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Also, on behalf of my country, I would like to express my profound thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to its Chairman, Ambassador Paul Badji, to the Division for Palestinian Rights in the Secretariat, and to the United Nations Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information for the efforts they have made and continue to make in order to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy on the question of Palestine, which call for putting an end to the continuous suffering of this people that has been going on for more than 60 years.

The General Assembly is meeting today, as champions of freedom, justice and truth have gathered on this day every year to reaffirm their support for the Palestinian people in their struggle against the Israeli occupation and for their right to self-determination and to establish their independent State on their own territory and to obtain the restoration of their, legitimate rights in full, including the refugees' right to return for refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

Many efforts have been undertaken by the United Nations, and hundreds of resolutions have been adopted calling upon Israel to end its occupation of Arab land. Israel, regrettably, continues to refuse to comply with the will of the international community. The Palestinian people are still under the yoke of the Israeli occupation and still suffer under Israel's policy of killing and destruction.

In the light of this dual problem, on the one hand, the fact that Israel does not comply with the international will, and, on the other hand, the continuation of the suffering of the Palestinian people, the United Nations has the urgent and immediate responsibility to shoulder its responsibilities vis-à-vis the question of Palestine, by finding a just solution to

this question, since this Organization is the same one that adopted resolution 181 (II) of 1947. Therefore, all United Nations Member States bear responsibility for non-implementation of that resolution until now.

Israel, the inception of which was legitimized through a resolution adopted by the United Nations, has no respect for international legitimacy or for moral or humanitarian principles. A few days ago, the representative of Israel arrogantly described this international Organization as an anti-Semitic organization.

We would like to recall that resolution 273 (III), which was adopted on 11 May 1949, established the conditions for Israel's admission as a Member of the United Nations, namely, that it must adhere to and respect the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and accept its resolutions — in particular resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), which emphasized the right of Palestine to establish a State and the return to Palestine of refugees who had been forcibly displaced. At that time, the General Assembly took note of Israel's statements and interpretations before the Special Political Committee, as well as its commitment vis-à-vis the implementation of the two resolutions. That pledge was noticeably ignored in the mechanisms of international accountability by Israel for many years.

The fact that the Security Council has not adopted any serious resolution with regard to Israel due to the objection of a well-known permanent member sends an erroneous message from the international community to Israel, namely, that Israel's State terrorism against the Palestinian people is acceptable. That makes States that are silent in the face of such crimes partners in the perpetration of those crimes.

Our meeting today is taking place as the entire world witnesses the displacement, destruction and killing of the Palestinian people in a manner unprecedented in modern history. That is being done through Israel's State terrorism against the unarmed Palestinian people. Israel is continuing to desecrate safe houses and places of worship, Islamic and Christian alike. It is also continuing excavations around those sites, under the pretext of seeking archeological artifacts. That is particularly the case at the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound and the Mughrabi Gate.

Israel is also continuing to expand its settlements in Jerusalem, its policy of collective punishment, the killing of hundreds of Palestinian women, children and the elderly, the building of its apartheid wall, expansion of settlements, and the destruction of infrastructure. It is also continuing to confiscate land, to raze agricultural land and to pursue its policies of detention and physical liquidation and assassination of democratically elected symbolic representatives of the Palestinian people.

Recent United Nations reports, including those of special rapporteurs of the international community, have illustrated the suffering of the Palestinian people as a result of Israel's targeted extrajudicial killings, collective punishment and destruction of all the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, which is under a suffocating siege due to the closure of crossings. That has made the Gaza Strip the world's largest jail, with a population deprived of basic needs.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 has reaffirmed that Israel is violating the proscription on collective punishment against an occupied people as set out in article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The cutting off of electricity and water supplies, the demolition of public buildings and the imposition of restrictions on the freedom of movement — all of which have been documented in United Nations reports — have an impact on the public health, nutrition, family life and psychological well-being of the Palestinian people. All of that constitutes a grave case of collective punishment and war crimes under international law and international humanitarian law.

All these Israeli practices have occurred since Israel put forth its unilateral plan to withdraw from Gaza, which it said was based on its desire for peace. However, Israel in fact continues to control the Gaza Strip's air space and its terrestrial and coastal borders. It is exercising this control in an effort to suppress the aspirations of the Palestinian people and to prevent them from exercising their humanitarian rights guaranteed under international law. The recent Israeli decision to declare the Gaza Strip hostile territory — which was followed by the cutting off of vital supplies such as fuel, electricity and water — was a further decision underscoring the fact that Israel is an outlaw State, that its collective punishments are but war crimes and that it enjoys legal and political impunity.

The Security Council and the international community should abandon their failure and paralysis with regard to deterring Israel from carrying out such policies. It is also important that the Council avoid double standards and take urgent and immediate steps with regard to Israel's illegal practices, so as to preserve its credibility and role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Given that the Security Council has yet to do so, Israel is continuing to refuse to implement the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion calling for an end to the construction and for the demolition of Israel's apartheid wall on occupied Palestinian territory. The building of the wall, in addition to the Israeli practices to which I have referred, has heightened the daily suffering of the Palestinian people in the West Bank. We agree here with recent United Nations reports that have referred to the importance of the Security Council's urging Israel to implement the advisory opinion and resolution ES-10/15, adopted by the General Assembly during its tenth emergency special session. The provisions of that resolution called on Israel to honour its legal obligation to halt the construction of the wall and to dismantle the parts that have already been built in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Israel is continuing to expand its settlements in the West Bank, to destroy property, to confiscate land and to carry out military incursions and extrajudicial killings. The number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails has now reached 11,000, including 400 children and dozens of parliamentarians, including the Speaker of the Palestinian Parliament himself. The number of Palestinians martyred by Israel since 2000 has reached 4,000, including more than 1,000 children.

A meeting was held at Annapolis on 27 November 2007 to relaunch the peace process between Arab parties and Israel. The Syrian Arab Republic participated in the deliberations of that meeting, owing to its keen interest to contribute to any international effort intended to bring about just and comprehensive peace in the region by starting talks on all the tracks of the peace process. Syria hopes that that process will end Israel's occupation of occupied Arab territories in Palestine, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, as well as occupied Syrian Golan and Lebanon's Shab'a farms.

In conclusion, Syria continues to believe that bringing about a just and comprehensive peace is possible only through Israel's implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); and 497 (1981), on the Syrian Golan, as well as the revitalization of the peace process begun at Madrid in 1991 and the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted at the Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002 and subsequently reaffirmed at the 2007 Riyadh Summit. That is the way to halt the cycle of violence and bloodshed that threatens the security and stability of the region, as well as international peace and security as a whole.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): It is most significant indeed that we are holding this debate today in the midst of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and the tremendous efforts by various quarters to bring peace to the Palestinians and to all nations of the Middle East region. The International Day of Solidarity is the occasion when the international community reaffirms its commitment to the Palestinian people and to the establishment of an independent and sovereign state of Palestine. We take this opportunity to urge the international community not only to express its feelings of solidarity but to accept the challenge of bringing the violence, uncertainty and suffering in Palestine to an end.

At present, Palestinians continue to face various hardships and challenges. At the crux of the problem lies the continued denial of their inalienable right to self-determination. Indonesia has consistently been, and will continue to be, at the Palestinians' side in their legitimate quest for self-determination and independence. Although we are geographically worlds apart, we are united by our belief that justice must be done to the Palestinian people, who are still living under occupation and, like many other nations, are entitled to peace and freedom.

The international community should collectively bring to an end the suffering of the Palestinian people, starting with re-energizing the peace process. Indonesia therefore welcomes various initiatives and diplomatic efforts to put in place a process with the goal of creating an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State. These include the recent Conference in Annapolis, which culminated in the Joint Understanding between the Palestinians and the Israelis. With the blueprint for follow-up negotiations to conclude a final solution by the end of 2008, we are hopeful that this is the beginning of the road to ending the conflict in a just, comprehensive and fair manner.

While we recognize that there are difficult days ahead in that process, my delegation is encouraged by the full commitment of all the parties to the exploration of every means to engender a peaceful resolution of the conflict. To that extent, last Tuesday's agreement by both parties to resume long-stalled negotiations immediately and on a biweekly basis is a significant and commendable step forward. We urge both sides to seize that momentum in order to reach a sustainable peaceful solution. At the same time, the international community, through this global institution, has the obligation to support and monitor the efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement, including the various initiatives and the Joint Understanding reached in Annapolis.

Efforts to revive the peace process can have traction only if Israel demonstrates a genuine desire to engage in the resolution of the core issues. For that to happen, the Security Council needs to ensure that Israel respects and abides by the resolutions of the United Nations relating to the conflict. We must reiterate that Israeli occupation remains the root cause of the conflict in the Middle East, with the Palestinian issue at the core of it. That has been acknowledged by countless resolutions of the United Nations, in particular, resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), and 1515 (2003), as well as the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 as endorsed by the Quartet. Consequently, a just and comprehensive solution to the conflict should resolve all outstanding core issues — such as those pertaining to borders, refugees, Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, water resources and security.

While the international community concentrates on reviving the peace process it is also important for Palestinians to unite. The unity of Palestinians is a prerequisite for sustainable peace. We continue to urge Palestinians to set their differences aside, through dialogue and reconciliation, and focus on the ultimate objective, namely, the realization of a sovereign and independent state where Palestinians live in peace and prosperity.

Pending the achievement of a just solution, the international community continues to have the obligation to assist the Palestinian people to alleviate the dire conditions under which they live. We must urgently and without delay address the worsening humanitarian situation, if we truly wish to nurture the seeds of peace in Palestine and convince the people to embrace the current peace efforts. On the basis of humanitarian need, such assistance should also go to all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In that regard, we welcome the conference planned for Paris on 17 December 2007. For our part, Indonesia, together with South Africa, will co-organize an Asia-Africa conference on capacity-building for Palestine next year, with the objective of strengthening the institutions needed to support the peace process and the Palestinian State.

Indonesia has always been supportive of efforts to bring about a speedy solution to the question of Palestine and to end the suffering of the Palestinian people. We stand ready to contribute to that process in order to realize an independent and prosperous Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel and other nations of the region. We continue to believe that we need a comprehensive approach to settle all the core issues resulting from the persistent occupation of Israel. We also concur with the assessment of the Secretary-General that no piecemeal solution can work in addressing this complex issue.

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to express the appreciation of my delegation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its enduring support of the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination. Year after year, since it was established in 1975, it has defied difficult circumstances to carry out its mandate. We look forward to the day when its commitment and service will be rewarded with the fulfilment of the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to independence. Until that time, we will continue to support the extension of its very important mandate.

Ms. Jahan (Bangladesh): Our meeting today takes on added significance, as it coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this auspicious occasion, Bangladesh joins the international community in reaffirming our full support for the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and freedom from continued occupation.

Year after year, we have held debates on the Palestinian question. Many important resolutions have been adopted by this body; yet the impasse continues and peace in the region remains ever-elusive.

The delegation of Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and by the representative of Pakistan, on behalf of Organization of the Islamic Conference. Given the importance of the matter, we would, however, like to highlight some of the points reaffirming our total solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The continued occupation of Palestine by Israel is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. Since 1967, the people of Palestine have been denied their fundamental right to self-determination and the right to live freely in their own land. Millions of Palestinians have been living in refugee camps for generations, in abject poverty. Their sufferings have been multiplied by the relentless and disproportionate scale of violence with which Israel chooses to react.

The distress of the Palestinians is further compounded by the Israeli policy of collective punishment in the form of excessive and indiscriminate force, extrajudicial killings, constant military incursions, targeted assassinations and indiscriminate detention, the blockade of roads, the demolition of houses, the confiscation of properties, and restrictions on movement. The list can go on and on. All that is done with the ultimate intention of systematically stifling the spirit of a nation. The continued imposition of prolonged closures by Israel has isolated the Gaza strip from the other parts of the Palestinian territory. In the West Bank, normal life is also hampered by military operations, numerous checkpoints and the systematic policy of illegal settlement.

The indomitable spirit of the Palestinian people to seek freedom cannot be extinguished simply by brute force. Sooner or later, Israel must heed the voice of reason. Israel must realize that this approach has proved to be wrong.

Bangladesh remains deeply concerned by the continued illegal construction of the separation wall and associated restrictions on the movement of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. Such closures have resulted in halting commercial activities and the loss of thousands of jobs. More and more families are slipping into the poverty trap, fueling more unrest. With the unabated continuation of the construction of the wall, ignoring the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, the occupied territories are increasingly being fragmented into smaller parts. That will affect the viability of a future Palestine State and endanger the prospect of a political settlement. Bangladesh reiterates its call for the immediate dismantling of the wall and the withdrawal of restrictions on the movements of Palestinian civilians.

The Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates specific provisions about the responsibilities of an occupying Power. Israel, being a signatory to the Convention and an occupying Power, cannot legally or morally absolve itself of those obligations. Bangladesh urges the international community to ensure full compliance with the Convention by Israel.

While we are outraged by the brutal suppression of the Palestinian people by Israeli forces, we are also frustrated by the factional infighting and divisions among the Palestinian people. Such lack of unity gives a wrong impression and adds fuel to the fire, thus making peace ever more elusive. The Palestinian people must consolidate unity in their own national interest. Bangladesh believes that the full and sincere implementation of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions can only resolve the Palestinian crisis. Overcoming mistrust and suspicion, refraining from provocative acts, ending the violence and resuming the peace talks are the imperatives of the day.

Bangladesh is cautiously observing the outcome of the Annapolis conference. We welcome the announcement of the new push for peace. We would like to be hopeful, but with caution. The failed legacies of the past and the still unfulfilled promises of progress in the road map towards Palestinian Statehood now require a much more intensified, dedicated and comprehensive effort for concrete advancement. More importantly, it would require sincere determination to translate words into actions, promises into reality and aspirations into achievable goals.

We believe, as does the Secretary-General, that it is time to abandon piecemeal approaches to resolving the Middle East crisis and to start final status negotiations that deal with all the disputed issues. Bangladesh will remain supportive of all initiatives that would give momentum to the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express deep thanks and gratitude to

you, Sir, for presiding over this important meeting. We wish you every success.

My delegation endorses the statements delivered by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan on behalf of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I also thank Ambassador Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal and Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for the Committee's report, which sheds light on the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Every year since the onset of the nakba — the tragedy that befell the Palestinian people in the middle of the previous century, which coincided both with the birth of their current plight and the establishment after the Second World War of the institutions of the international system, including the United Nations, that continue to dominate international relations — the situation has deteriorated. The human suffering; economic, social, health and cultural crises; and everything related to life and the environment have been continually exacerbated by the destructive actions of the Israeli occupying Power.

Hope often springs from the rubble and ruins of war and the destruction and pain it entails. Currently, all eyes are focused on the results of the Annapolis conference, hoping for concrete results. The Annapolis conference, convened by President George Bush of the United States of America to consider the situation in the Middle East, concluded its work on the evening of 27 November in a spirit of cautious optimism. The onset of continuous Israel-Palestinian negotiations on a final settlement leading to Israel's withdrawal to the borders of 4 June 1967, the return of the Palestinian refugees to their land, and the establishment of a Palestinian State, with its capital in East Jerusalem, will put an end to what is widely acknowledged to be the most bloody and tragic conflict in the Middle East.

Many who aspire to and dream of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East hope that the United States mediator, who will enjoy the solidarity and support of the international community and the United Nations, will play a positive and equitable role in putting an end to the conflict. Total withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the return of East Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty are prerequisites for sustainable peace and the normalization of the situation in this sensitive region.

Those who believe that they can, indeed, keep occupied territories and impose a de facto situation, finding peace and security for themselves at the expense of the peace and stability of others, who think they can normalize the situation in that region according to their own vision are living an illusion, have never learned either the lessons of history or the history of the Holy Lands.

My Government emphasizes the importance of working towards a just and comprehensive peace in the region and believes that this can be realized by recognizing the need to relaunch Syrian-Israeli negotiations from the point where they were left off — not to start again from scratch. These negotiations must have as their goal Israel's total withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and to have Israel commit itself to the promise that the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made to the Syrian Arab Republic — that Israel would withdraw totally from the occupied Golan.

My Government emphasizes the need to respect the sovereignty and stability of sisterly Lebanon. Lebanon has suffered the woes of wars launched by Israel, the last of which was in the summer of 2006. We need to resume negotiations along this track in a manner that would see an Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territories, including the Shab'a farms.

My country firmly believes that peace is an indivisible whole and cannot succeed in one single track without progress being realized simultaneously on the other tracks. We emphasize the importance of a comprehensive and just peace so that the region can cope with and join the train of peace and development as well as play its civilizational a role for which it has been known throughout history.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.